DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 351 571 CE 062 456

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TITLE Why Adults Learn: Towards a Theory of Participation in Adult Education.
REPORT NO ISBN-0-415-02480-3
PUB DATE 92
NOTE 191p.; Routledge Series on Theory and Practice of Adult Education in North America.
AVAILABLE FROM Routledge, Chapman & Hall, 29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001 ($55).
PUB TYPE Books (010) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE Document Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Education; *Adult Learning; *Educational Research; Educational Theories; *Motivation; *Participation; Psychological Studies; *Social Influences; *Social Psychology; Social Science Research

ABSTRACT

Voluntary participation in organized learning activities by adults is probably the most researched subject in the literature of adult education. Research goes back to the earliest days of 20th-century adult education in the United States. Surveys of adult learners within a broad empirical-positivist or policy-oriented framework are still the most frequent form that research in adult education takes. Theoretical attempts to explain participation have been much less plentiful until recently. Most modern research on adult learning and its causes is largely psychological in tone and tendency and fails to do justice to the environment or social context in which the activity occurs. In general, each of the major types of psychological explanations measures a fraction of the total reality. A persistent problem is how to derive a set of behaviors or actions (participation) based only on knowledge of motives and motivational antecedents. A transition may be made away from learning as intrinsically psychobiological in nature and toward a view of it as a species of socially significant and normative action. The implications of this view can be developed through a study of the concept of social participation, especially as it relates to two of the more significant dimensions of that concept: membership in voluntary associations and uses of leisure. This interpretation can be extended by examining adult education in the context of society at large and its major functions. (Appendices include endnotes, 303-item bibliography, and index.) (YLB)

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